



Hon. Robert T. Matsui

Member of Congress

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Robert T. Matsui
Serving California's 5th District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Saturday, April 24, 2004

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STATEMENT BY ROBERT T. MATSUI ON THE OPENING OF THE MANZANAR HISTORIC SITE INTERPRETIVE CENTER AND PARK HEADQUARTERS

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congressman Robert T. Matsui (D-Sacramento) delivered the following remarks today via videotape at the opening of the Manzanar National Historic Site Interpretative Center and Park Headquarters.

Matsui originally introduced Congressional legislation in 1992 that established the Manzanar internment camp as a National Historic Site. In 1996, he also initiated legislation that led to the expansion of the historic site to allow for the construction of the Headquarters. And in 2001, Matsui supported a request for federal funding necessary to construct the Interpretative Center and Park Headquarters.

Matsui has been a strong supporter of faithfully preserving the Manzanar National Historic Site so that all Americans may gain a deeper understanding of individual rights, democracy, and freedom by understanding the experiences of U.S. citizens interned during World War II.

Below is the text of Matsui's remarks:

"I would like to extend a warm welcome to the individuals, families, and community leaders present here today. While we gather to celebrate the grand opening of the Manzanar Interpretive Center and Headquarters, we once again commemorate a site where 11,000 of the more than 120,000 American citizens of Japanese ancestry were uprooted from their homes and communities and interned in 1942. As the first internment camp created by Executive Order 9066, Manzanar is a critical component in recognizing and understanding the events of the past so that we Americans may maintain our country's fundamental commitment to freedom, democracy, and individual rights.

"It has been a long process to preserve the important events that took place at Manzanar. When the internment camp closed in November of 1945, much of the original site was dismantled, but a few buildings were used by the local community for public meetings and events. Despite the circumstances, Manzanar remained the best preserved of the ten internment camps. As a result, Congress designated it a National Historic Site in 1992 with strong grassroots and national support. And in 1996, I was honored to help pass legislation which provided the Park Service with sufficient land for the creation of the national landmark. When construction of the Interpretive Center began in 2002, a surviving auditorium built by Japanese Americans during their internment was fittingly made the backbone of this facility.

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“Each of these steps would not have been possible had not thousands of individuals offered their assistance along the way. I would like to thank several people in particular:

- Sue Kunitomi Embrey, the Manzanar Committee founder and organizer of the annual Manzanar Pilgrimage, has been instrumental in channeling grassroots support for this site and center;
- The eleven-member Manzanar National Historic Site Advisory Commission provided a decade of invaluable guidance to the Park Service throughout the planning process.
- Finally, I would also like to thank National Park Service Director Fran Mainella and Manzanar Superintendent Frank Hays for their stewardship and guidance.

“These individuals, and the thousands of others who assisted in restoring Manzanar, deserve our deepest gratitude for their dedication to preserving part of our national history.

“Once again, thank you for your commitment to the legacy of Manzanar. The Manzanar National Historic Site and Interpretive Center serves to remind us that as a great democracy, we have the power to recognize our mistakes of the past, and to act with courage today to preserve our basic freedom and individual rights under the Constitution of the United States.”

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